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MAJOR HOTEL BRANDS ARE GIVING AWAY STUFF FOR FREE

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CALL IN SICK

Blissing Out in Ojai

AFTER A LONG WEEKEND IN THIS TOWN NORTH OF L.A., YOU'LL BE FEELING IN THE PINK. BY NINA WILLDORF

Every town chooses something to be proud of, and in Ojai, it's the sunsets. Pride is an understatement; sunsets are such a ceremony that locals have a name—"The Pink Moment"—to describe when the tips of the Topa Topa mountains take on the shade of cotton candy. There's even a preferred perch from which to watch: **Meditation Mount**, a new age center devoted to the power of meditation, on the eastern side of town.

Ojai (oh-high), which means "moon" in the language of the Native American Chumash tribe, is in a valley that would be carpeted in subdivisions if it were anywhere else in southern California. But the 7,800 residents take its preservation very seriously, and save for a Carrows restaurant, you'll be hard-pressed to find a chain business.

Even the fast food is local. Past Meditation Mount, out toward

the town of Santa Paula, is **The Summit**, an old-fashioned roadside stand. Thin hamburgers come doused in a

Thousand-Islandy sauce, and cherry milkshakes are made with fresh, juicy fruit.

The biggest shop on Ojai Avenue, the main drag, is a family-owned department store called **Rains**. It has been around for

130 years—eons by southern California standards—and for the last 90, it's been in the hands of three generations of the Rains family. At the checkout, a salesperson points to Alan Rains himself, who is fluffing a display of oven mitts.

Ojai has long attracted artists, with the most famous being deceased potter Beatrice Wood, and hotels and restaurants make a point showing local artists' work. The dozen rooms at the mission-style **Blue Iguana Inn** are like mini-galleries, with works for sale on the walls. **Azu**, a tapas bar and *gelateria*, decorates its back room with photos you can purchase; **Movino Wine Bar & Gallery** sells artwork and a nice selection of area Viogniers by the glass.

This is a spa town, and **The Oaks at Ojai** offers treatments and fitness classes to day visitors, in addition to hosting overnight guests. (Rooms start at \$175 a night per person.) When asked to focus on a single area and go deeper, a massage therapist is likely to breathe in, nod knowingly, and say something like, "That's cool—it simply requires some flexibility on our part, which is always a good thing."

Perhaps because the surrounding **Los Padres National Forest** serves as a constant



The Ojai Valley

Bart's Books



Movino, on Ojai Avenue



The Summit

reminder, locals clearly believe that nature is to be respected. At **Bart's Books**, a new and used bookstore, thousands of rare books are

shielded only by corrugated plastic. The branches of an enormous grapefruit tree peek through the makeshift roof, their fruit just out of reach. By the register, browsers are invited to help themselves to complimentary coffee, and then use free Wi-Fi at one of the picnic tables.

On any given day, people pass the hours at **Ojai Coffee Roasting Co.**, chatting about Reiki and poring over books like *The Experience of Nothingness*. A few nights a week, they're enveloped by the warm aroma of the roaster as it begins work on a fresh batch of beans. But it's not all new age nirvana. At one table, several locals excitedly compare notes on how much their real estate values have risen in the last few years. ■



Spaaaaahs!
For a list of the top 15 spa values in America—including The Oaks at Ojai—visit BudgetTravelOnline.com

LODGING

Blue Iguana Inn
11794 N. Ventura Ave., 805/646-5277, blueiguanainn.com, from \$99

FOOD

The Summit
12689 Santa Paula-Ojai Rd., 805/933-9898, burger \$3.50

Azu
457 E. Ojai Ave., 805/640-7987, tapas from \$5

Movino
308 E. Ojai Ave., 805/646-1555

Ojai Coffee Roasting Co.
337 E. Ojai Ave., 805/646-4478

ACTIVITIES

Meditation Mount
10340 Reeves Rd., 805/646-5508

The Oaks at Ojai
122 E. Ojai Ave., 800/753-6257,

oaksspa.com,
massage \$75

Los Padres National Forest
17017 Maricopa Hwy., 805/640-9060

SHOPPING

Rains
218 E. Ojai Ave., 805/646-1441

Bart's Books
302 W. Matilija St., 805/646-3755